A balancing act

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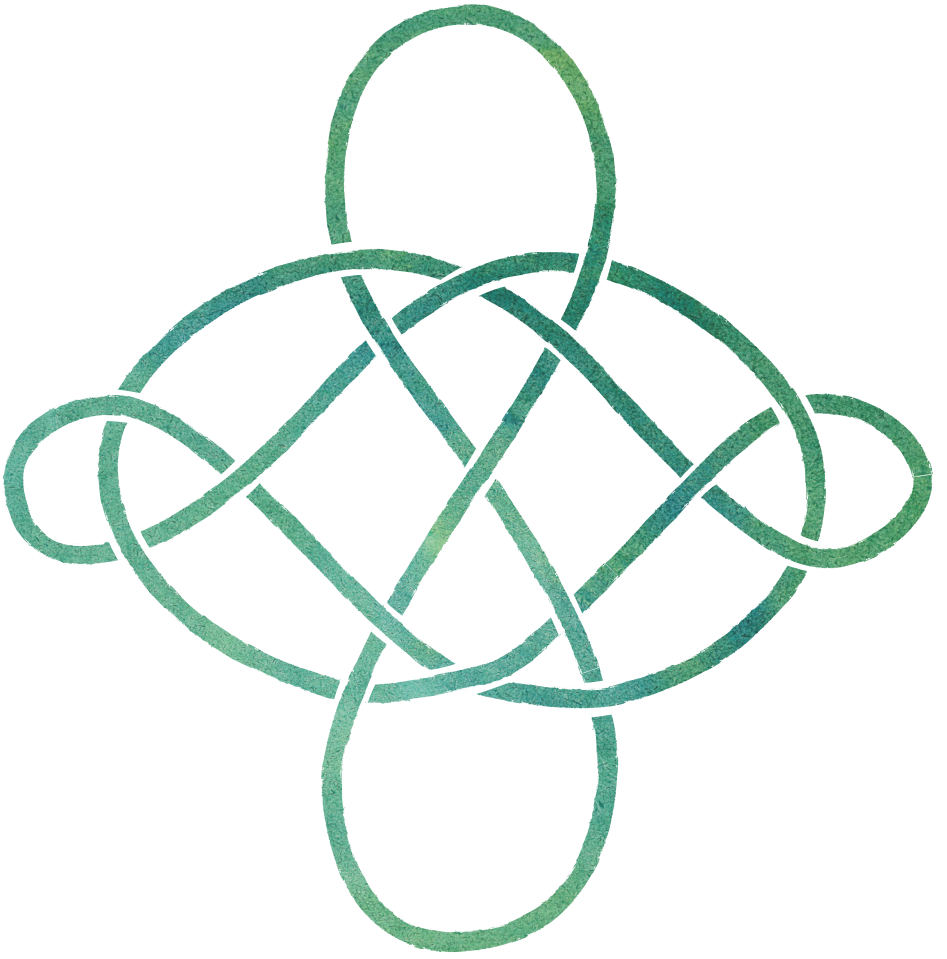


Chapter One

Introduction

> "I actually think it's great. I think that's actually – I think just the fact that people take it so seriously and are so obviously emotional and tense, that really – you really know you're in the right place."

This quote from a cross-sector partnership convener, in response to my question of whether or not he would have approached a complex partnership he had convened differently in hindsight, nicely illustrates the core premises of this dissertation. To summarize these premises, collaboration in cross-sector partnerships: (1) is complex for the actors and organizations involved, (2) inherently includes the experience of tension, and (3) is a process in which conveners can play an important role. Set in the context of sustainable development, this dissertation looks at collaborative efforts that span the boundaries of businesses, nonprofits, and governments. Such collaborations – here referred to as cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) – are believed by practitioners and scientists alike to have the potential to effectively address some of the more complex sustainability challenges the world is currently facing (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015; George, Howard-Grenville, & Tihanyi, 2016). Consequently, CSPs have reached an almost paradigmatic status in the arena of policy makers. Examples of global challenges addressed within CSPs are climate change, poverty, and deforestation; striking illustrations in recent media coverage include the ongoing and increasing rate of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest (Reuters, 2019) and the severe negative impact of (climate change related) wildfires on Australia's biodiversity (Fountain, 2020). Considering the urgency and relevance of such issues, it is important to better understand how the CSPs that aim to address them are initiated and convened.

Scholars who have studied CSPs over the past decades have warned us that partnerships are complex organizational forms and not a guaranteed recipe for success, emphasizing that "designing partnerships to capitalize on differences rather than being stymied by them requires skillful leadership" (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p. 11). Such a quote highlights the importance of "skillful leaders," in this dissertation conceptualized as conveners, to enhance the chances of CSP success. With a particular focus on conveners in the form

of pro-active, mission-driven, nonprofit organizations in the domain of sustainable trade, this dissertation explores and explains how these mission-driven conveners aim to advance their sustainability agenda by convening CSPs, guided by the following research question:

How do mission-driven conveners initiate and convene cross-sector partnerships to strengthen sustainable development in global supply chains?

The three key concepts included in the research question – i.e., cross-sector partnerships, mission-driven conveners, and convening – are defined and explained in Section 1.2 of this introductory chapter. The context in which I answer the research question – i.e., that of sustainable development in global supply chains – is both societally relevant and timely given that internationally operating businesses are increasingly expected to consider their social and/or environmental responsibilities in the production, trade, and/or procurement of their products. For example, the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh in 2013 increased the pressure on international brands to take responsibility for the working conditions and labor rights of their supply chain workers, resulting since in the emergence of multiple (multi-stakeholder) initiatives (De Bakker, Rasche, & Ponte, 2019; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015).

From a theoretical standpoint, this dissertation contributes to a growing body of literature on CSPs – which has taken flight over the past decades, mirroring an increase in attention for CSPs in practice. In particular, my research contributes to our understanding of *the role* of conveners in CSPs. Conceptualizing conveners as mission-driven organizations that pro-actively organize CSPs to advance their mission of sustainability allowed me to study in detail how conveners build and maintain collaboration among heterogeneous CSP actors. Having witnessed tension and contradictions on multiple levels throughout my data-collection – from the content of CSPs' objectives to the collaborative processes between actors and/or organizations – I use paradox literature to help analyze and elaborate on how these conveners went about navigating such tensions. As such, my theoretical contribution provides a more fine-grained understanding of *how* such mission-driven conveners

play a role in CSP formation and implementation in order to advance their sustainable development goals.

Empirically, my argumentation builds on my own qualitative case studies, conducted to examine the convening efforts in three international supply chains: the coffee, timber, and tea industries. The CSPs resulting from these efforts differ significantly in each supply chain in terms of their size, scope, and objectives. Regardless of these differences, however, my research is able to address the commonalities these cases exhibit in terms of how conveners pursue their goals. Using a variety of qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, I was able to gather large datasets for each of these three cases. Practitioners emphasize the importance of collaboration in CSPs for the advancement of the sustainable development agenda: e.g., the 17th UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development." As such, the societal relevance of this dissertation lies in its contribution to our understanding of the initiatory and supportive role conveners play in partnerships that aim to address complex sustainable development issues.

To a large extent, this research was motivated by my past involvement with a mission-driven nonprofit organization (NPO) that convenes CSPs in order to strengthen sustainability in global supply chains. Having previously worked for this organization, which also hosted two of the three empirical studies included in this dissertation, I began my research with firsthand knowledge of both the complexities involved in this kind of work (i.e., in "convening") and the challenges faced by practitioners in the field. As a result, I was able to conduct my research as an engaged scholar and to ask more-pointed questions, which I will further explain in Section 1.3. Likewise, I strove throughout my entire PhD trajectory to complement my specialized practitioner knowledge with theoretical insights, specifically those from the discipline of organization studies.

In this introductory chapter I provide the empirical, theoretical, and methodological background necessary to contextualize my research. Section 1.1 elaborates on my research context, i.e., sustainable development in global supply chains. In Section 1.2 I define the three key concepts of my research,

i.e., CSPs, mission-driven conveners, and convening. In Section 1.3 I outline my research approach and elaborate on my position as an engaged scholar. Section 1.4 includes an overview of the four empirical chapters that comprise this dissertation and explains how they fit together. Lastly, in Section 1.5, I list the background of each empirical chapter. Because all four empirical chapters are either composed of or based on papers that have been published in or will be submitted to international, peer-reviewed journals, each individual chapter also features its own section on research context, theory, and methods. As a result, there may be some overlap between this introductory chapter and the four empirical chapters that follow. Nevertheless, I will begin here by presenting a general overview of my entire research project, which emphasizes the coherence between the empirical chapters.

1.1 Sustainable development in global supply chains

Sustainable development – i.e., development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987) – has become an increasingly prominent agenda point for nations, businesses, and civil society organizations. In 2015, the United Nations formulated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 as a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that expired in 2015 (SDG Knowledge Platform, n.d.). In contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs are considered universal and a call for action in all countries (as opposed to in developing countries only). Moreover, the SDGs cover more issues, acknowledge the interconnectedness between these issues, and aim to address root causes. The fact that there are 17 SDGs, which include 169 targets and 232 indicators, nicely illustrates the magnitude and complexity of the global sustainable development agenda. SDG 17, in short "partnerships for the goals," urges cross-boundary collaboration in multiple ways: by encouraging international cooperation between national governments, but also between different societal sectors, including civil society, research, and business. This emphasis by policy makers on cross-sector collaboration

shows how rapidly the "partnership paradigm" has spread in the context of sustainable development.

Narrowing our focus to the context of this dissertation, i.e., sustainable development in global supply chains[1], we find that global supply chains are considered a relevant and important arena to address the SDG agenda, proof of which can be found in policy shifts over the last two decades ("from aid to trade"), and in the increased calls on businesses to take responsibility for sustainability issues in their supply chains. Throughout numerous sectors, previous efforts to strengthen sustainability in global supply chains have included the development of roundtables and certification standards[2], e.g., the Round Table on Responsible Soy, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, the Forest Stewardship Council, and the Common Code for the Coffee Community. Such multi-stakeholder initiatives connect businesses, NPOs, and/or governments in order to jointly develop Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS), i.e., certification standards for the responsible or sustainable sourcing of globally traded commodities. Since their establishment, NPOs have played an important role in stimulating businesses to adhere to such standards. Not only have global VSSs already been proliferating for decades now[3] (Auld, 2010), they have also been widely adopted by businesses over recent years as a way to mitigate reputational risks and take responsibility for sustainability in their own supply chains (Boström, Jönsson, Lockie, Mol, & Oosterveer, 2015; Perego & Kolk, 2012). Meanwhile, critical researchers have pointed out the flaws of using certification as a means to address sustainability in supply chains (Fransen & Kolk, 2007; Poynton, 2015). An obvious downside is the sheer number of standards available (Auld, 2010), which, despite conceivably "be[ing] positively valued since competition may spur innovation" (Derkx & Glasbergen, 2014, p. 41), has also led to duplication, increased cost of compliance for producers, and the emergence of a "market

1 In my dissertation, I use the concepts "sustainable development in (global) supply chains," "(strengthen) sustainability in (global) supply chains," and "(strengthen) supply chain sustainability" interchangeably.

2 Certification is defined as "the provision by an independent body of written assurance (a certificate) that the product, service or system in question meets specific requirements" (Mori Junior et al., 2016, p. 581).

3 There are currently at least 230 VSSs – see, for instance, the standards map of the International Trade Centre: http://www.intracen.org/itc/market-info-tools/voluntary-standards/standardsmap/ (Visited February 5, 2020).

for standards," in which VSSs compete for market share (Derkx & Glasbergen, 2014; Mori Junior, Franks, & Ali, 2016; Reinecke, Manning, & Von Hagen, 2012). Moreover, questions have been raised around whether certification can have a substantial impact on more complex or "systemic" sustainability issues, such as environmental degradation or poverty alleviation (Barry et al., 2012; Okereke & Stacewicz, 2018; Raynolds, 2009).

In line with SDG 17, it has been increasingly suggested that collaboration – defined here as CSPs – between businesses, NPOs, and other societal sectors may be a promising strategy when it comes to spurring sustainable development in global supply chains. Such CSPs may complement certification in two ways. First, CSPs can potentially address the complex sustainability issues that are "beyond certification," i.e., the issues certification has not been able to address effectively. Take, for example, the complex challenge of poverty alleviation, which features prominently in the case found in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Here, although certification itself proved unable to address the issue of low wages for workers on tea estates, the CSPs that more directly engaged businesses in collective efforts were able to provide another, more effective means of addressing the complex issue of poverty. Second, CSPs can also support the creation of an "enabling environment," which many consider an important precondition for upscaling the impact of certification schemes (Waarts, Judge, Brons, & de Ruyter de Wildt, 2013). This was the case, for example, in the CSPs studied in the coffee sector as analyzed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Here, CSPs in the coffee sector aimed to stimulate multi-stakeholder dialogue and strengthen its governance in various production countries, partly to stimulate and support farmers in the implementation of more sustainable production practices (which could potentially lead to certification in the future). Because of the value CSPs add to certification-driven efforts or roundtables, NPOs have not only increasingly emphasized the relevance of such partnerships in tackling global supply chains' sustainability challenges, they have also been active in initiating and convening CSPs as a means of achieving their objectives.

However, CSPs in the domain of supply chain sustainability are complex for several reasons. First, they often include multiple private sector partners from different levels of the supply chain, i.e., producers, traders, and

procurement companies. Second, they implicate the core business of the companies involved, a result of the policy adaptations they suggest for both sourcing and production – which, potentially, include trade-offs between (short term) profitability and (long term) sustainability. Because of these complexities, NPOs play an important role in convening CSP business actors to adopt more sustainable sourcing and production practices. Given a general consensus that CSPs are an appropriate means to address issues related to sustainable development, NPOs have been putting increasing emphasis on either their active participation in CSPs or on establishing CSPs in which they can take a pro-active role as initiator and/or convener. In this dissertation, I explore this second trend and study how such mission-driven NPOs initiate and convene CSPs in order to achieve their objective: sustainability in global supply chains.

1.2 Key concepts

Three key concepts emerge from the central question of this dissertation: cross-sector partnerships, mission-driven conveners, and convening. In this section I outline how I define these three concepts and how my perspective on these concepts builds on prior research.

1.2.1 Cross-sector partnerships

Cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) are defined here as collaborative arrangements between businesses, NPOs, and/or governments which have been explicitly formed to address social, environmental and/or economic issues and causes that actively engage the partners on an ongoing basis. This definition builds on that of Selsky and Parker (2005) by including, beyond social causes, also the environmental and economic causes that motivate organizations to collaborate. When it comes to supply chain sustainability, the context of this research, CSPs may address either one or a combination of these causes, as social, economic, and environmental issues in supply chains are often strongly connected and difficult to address in isolation – as Chapter 2 will show.

Although there is an active community of researchers studying CSPs, we cannot (yet) speak of a theoretical field: there is still no such thing as "CSP theory." Instead, CSPs are studied using a variety of (organizational theory) research perspectives. Researchers have nonetheless been preoccupied with the theorization of CSPs, studying, for example: the different phases that can be discerned in the life cycle of a CSP (cf. Clarke & Fuller, 2010; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009), the different types of CSPs according to the intensity of participant collaboration (cf. Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a), the different challenges that potentially inhibit the success of CSPs (cf. Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Van Tulder & Keen, 2018), the different conditions that increase the likelihood of success (cf. Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016), and different evaluation frameworks to show whether or not CSPs are actually delivering on their promises (cf. Stadtler, 2016; Van Tulder, Seitanidi, Crane, & Brammer, 2016).

CSPs can significantly differ in, for example, their scope and ambition. In this dissertation, I focus specifically on CSPs with transformative ambitions. Transformative CSPs – also referred to as CSPs for systemic change (Clarke & Crane, 2018) – aim to address complex social and environmental issues (Waddock, 1989), and to "cocreate transformative change at the societal level" (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012, p. 736). In the context of global supply chains, this means that companies are encouraged to move beyond a purely economic view of their own supply chains and to work within CSPs in order to strengthen the collective sustainability efforts of entire sourcing regions; the result of which leads to a balance of economic, social, and ecological considerations (MacDonald, Clarke, & Huang, 2019; Narrod et al., 2009; Valente, 2010; Valente & Oliver, 2018).

Compared to "regular" CSPs, transformative CSPs that aim to strengthen sustainability in global supply chains have some distinct features that increases their complexity. First, they include multiple companies that operate on different levels of the supply chain (i.e., producers, traders, and exporters), which then introduces cross-level dynamics, which of course render the CSP more complex. Second, these CSPs may also include multiple businesses from the same supply chain "level," e.g., direct competitors who wish to work together on sustainability-related issues. This can lead to a

situation referred to as "coopetition": the co-occurrence of competition and collaboration, which can lead to friction within and between organizations (Stadtler, 2018; Stadtler & van Wassenhove, 2016). Third, supply chain sustainability touches on the competitive elements of "doing business," which may potentially result in conflicts between business and social logics (Laari, Töyli, & Ojala, 2017). Not only may the sum of these features potentially inhibit successful collaboration, but such complex settings may also simultaneously exacerbate the challenges commonly seen within CSPs. As a result, in order to move businesses beyond their own individual corporate social responsibility agenda (CSR) toward collaboration, and to facilitate collaboration between competitors and other stakeholders in sector-wide CSPs (Gond, Kang, & Moon, 2011; Quarshie, Salmi, & Leuschner, 2016), the involvement of "conveners" becomes crucial.

1.2.2 Mission-driven conveners

Here, conveners are defined as the actors or organizations that initiate and convene CSPs[4]. Research on conveners is characterized by conceptual ambiguity, as multiple terms have been used to describe the actors I call conveners, e.g.: brokers (Hundal, 2014; Stott, 2019; Tennyson, 2005), broker organizations (Stadtler & Probst, 2012), interveners (Gray & Purdy, 2018), facilitative leaders (Ansell & Gash, 2007), and bridging agents (Manning & Roessler, 2014). Moreover, conveners have been studied in various management and organization traditions, e.g.,: CSP research (Gray & Purdy, 2018; Hundal, 2014; Stadtler & Probst, 2012; Vurro, Dacin, & Perrini, 2010), institutional theory (Dorado, 2005), leadership theory (Fleming & Waguespack, 2007), social movement theory (Diani & McAdam, 2003), and knowledge management (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Pemsel & Wiewiora, 2013).

4 In this dissertation, the noun "convener" and the verb "convening" are used interchangeably. However, because both concepts feature separately in my research question, I have chosen to define them both separately in this section. The noun refers to the organization or actor who is performing the convening, of which I am focused on a particular type (i.e., the "mission-driven" type). "Convening," the activity or process, is discussed in the next subsection (1.2.3). Later, the empirical chapters emphasize either the convener (actor) or convening (process), or a combination of the two.

In this dissertation, I adopt the term convener[5], building on prior conceptualizations (Dorado, 2005; Dorado & Vaz, 2003; Gray, 1989; Svendsen & Laberge, 2005; Wood & Gray, 1991). This choice was also motivated by its centrality in my empirical domain: the NPOs I studied throughout my data-collection explicitly referred to their strategies and activities as "convening CSPs." Moreover, because of my interest in both the convener (the actor) and convening (the process), I prefer the verb convening – over, for example, "brokering," "bridging," or "leading" – because it more adequately captures the convener's variety of role(s) in relation to the CSP. Convening, as conceptualized in this dissertation, includes a complex combination of different roles, for example, brokering, bridging, and/or leading. I will elaborate on this in the next section, when I conceptualize convening (the process).

In the research on CSPs, conveners are often considered akin to a "resource" in the sense that their involvement enhances the likelihood of the CSP's success: they are expected to mitigate the challenges commonly associated with CSPs in order to drive progress toward the CSP's ultimate objective. The CSP, usually, is the unit of analysis and the inclusion of a convener contributes to its success. In this dissertation, I depart from a different assumption and focus instead on the convener as the unit of analysis. This is important, because the organizations that convene CSPs in the cases I studied have their own ambitions and missions, which reach beyond those of the various CSPs in which they are involved. Initiating and convening CSPs, therefore, is used as a strategy for these organizations to realize their own ambitions and objectives. As a result, rather than using my dissertation to study how a CSP benefits from the involvement of a convener, I seek to understand how such conveners – which I conceptualize as "mission-driven conveners" – operate in order to reach their own objectives; in my case, the objective of strengthening sustainability in global supply chains.

Prior research has differentiated between proactive and reactive conveners (Stadtler & Probst, 2012): proactive conveners initiate CSPs whereas reactive conveners are asked by CSP partners to take on a convener role. Mission-driven conveners are proactive, and, in addition, have a normative motivation

5 For the sake of clarity I will henceforth use the term "convener," also when citing research that adopts a different terminology.

to initiate and convene a CSP. Considering conveners as mission-driven organizations that initiate and convene CSPs to reach their own ambitions may alter our assumptions about conveners' "success factors" as identified in prior research, such as the characteristics, skills, or organizational traits required to convene, and the roles to be played by conveners. In the next subsection, I elaborate on these attributes and activities as identified in prior research on convening (the process).

1.2.3 Convening

Convening is, in this dissertation, considered to be an ongoing activity or process that takes place throughout the entire CSP's life cycle. Prior research on convening has often considered it to be an activity that only takes place in the earlier stages of partnership formation, referring to the bringing together of relevant parties and scoping of collaboration interests (Clarke & Fuller, 2010; Dorado & Vaz, 2003; Gray, 1989; Gray & Purdy, 2018). In line with Stadtler and Probst (2012), I argue for its relevance beyond the CSP formation stage only and consider it relevant throughout the entire CSP's life cycle; defining it as: *bringing together heterogeneous actors in a CSP, bridging between the different interests of each actor, and driving progress throughout the CSP's life cycle – this includes strategy development, negotiation of the objectives, and the implementation of activities that further the realization of the CSP's objectives.*

This definition conceptualizes convening as a complex and multifaceted process, and includes a variety of activities and roles that may be taken on by the convener over a longer period of time. Examples of convening activities are: scoping interests for collaboration among heterogeneous actors, bringing these actors to the table to negotiate joint objectives and collaborate on complex issues, solidifying the joint objectives in CSP ambitions or intention statements, and driving progress throughout the implementation of the CSP's activities (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Gray, 1989; Hundal, 2014; Manning & Roessler, 2014; Montgomery, Dacin, & Dacin, 2012; Wood & Gray, 1991). In addition, conveners are expected to negotiate in order to: resolve conflict between partners, overcome initial distrust between partners, and/or mitigate and overcome challenges in order to safeguard the CSP's progress (Dorado & Vaz, 2003; Vangen & Huxham, 2003, 2008). These activities imply a

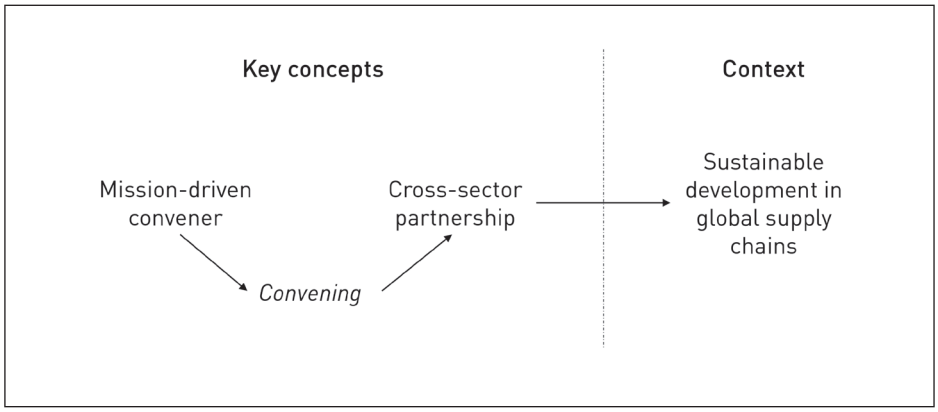
variety of potential roles, such as leader, facilitator, and/or mediator (cf. Gray & Purdy, 2018; Stadtler & Probst, 2012; Yan, Lin, & Clarke, 2018).

Research on CSP conveners has identified several characteristics, skills, and organizational traits that are important to successfully convene CSPs. For example, convening requires the convener to have a certain level of authority, which can – in the case of proactive conveners – be based on either mandate or persuasion (Wood & Gray, 1991). In any case, conveners must be seen as a neutral or unbiased party in the eyes of CSP members (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Dorado & Vaz, 2003; Kalegaonkar & Brown, 2000). If they have a vested interest in the collaboration, then they will be considered ineffective in their role of "honest broker" (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Furthermore, convening requires not only familiarity with the situation or context of the partnership in question, but also a sense of timing, a sufficient display of political clout, and a capacity to see the beneficial impact of the collaboration for all partners involved (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Dorado & Vaz, 2003; Gray & Purdy, 2018).

Current knowledge of convening, as summarized above, stems from the assumption that conveners contribute to CSP success (the CSP being the unit of analysis): it identifies the skills and characteristics that conveners require, the different roles they ought to play, and the activities they should undertake in order to foster CSP success. Given my alternative perspective, taking the (mission-driven) convener as not only my unit of analysis but also the instigator of transformative CSPs, I seek to understand if and how prior research findings – i.e., the known convening attributes, roles, and activities – maintain their relevance when we conceptualize conveners as mission-driven organizations. In other words, does the convener's position as a mission-driven organization influence the convening process and, if so, how? Building on extant knowledge of what convening entails, I thus seek to understand how mission-driven conveners initiate and convene CSPs.

Altogether, my conceptualizations of, and elaborations on, the three key concepts in my research question provide the framework on which this dissertation is built. Figure 1.1 illustrates the connections between these key concepts: starting with the mission-driven convener as my unit of analysis, I analyze how these organizations convene CSPs in order to strengthen sustainable development in global supply chains.

Figure 1.1: Overview of the relations between the key concepts and the research context



1.3 Research approach

In this dissertation I adopt a qualitative case study research method to study how mission-driven conveners initiate and convene CSPs in the timber, coffee, and tea sectors (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994). A qualitative approach provides a good methodological fit, considering my interest in answering the questions of "how" and "why" (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007). I collected data for three cases from three different industries, each of which allowed me to emphasize different elements related to my research question – which I will further explain in Section 1.4. In this section I will first elaborate on my own position as an engaged scholar, which stems from my strong connection to the research subject. Next, I will explain how I selected the three cases that feature in the empirical chapters of this dissertation. A note: because each empirical chapter also includes a section on methodology, please refer to the individual chapters for details on each study's data collection and analysis strategies.

1.3.1 Engaged scholarship

To explain my own position as a researcher in this doctoral thesis, I begin with the notion of engaged scholarship (Boyer, 1996; Van de Ven, 2007). "The scholarship of engagement," a term first coined by Ernest L. Boyer

in his eponymous article published in 1996, refers to the responsibility of academics to "become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic and moral problems" (p. 18). In other words, academics have a responsibility to collaborate with practitioners and to develop knowledge that is relevant to society, instead of simply working in isolation from their ivory towers. Engaged scholarship thus refers to "a participative form of research for obtaining the different perspectives of key stakeholders (researchers, users, clients, sponsors, and practitioners) in studying complex problems" (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 9). As I translated the idea of engaged scholarship into practice, I not only deliberately maintained a strong connection between academia and practice throughout my research, I also prioritized the collection of diverse perspectives in each of my three case studies, as I will now explain.

My first introduction to the field of sustainable trade was in 2012, when someone in my personal network connected me to FSC-Netherlands, the organization that hosted one of the three case studies in this dissertation (Chapter 4). At that time, my master's study of a CSP that was initiated and convened by FSC-Netherlands sparked my interest in cross-sector collaboration, convening, and the field of sustainable trade, and in 2013 I started working as a practitioner for another NPO, which later hosted the other two case studies found in this dissertation: the cases on tea (Chapters 2 and 5) and coffee (Chapter 3). Funded by multiple European governments, my previous employer's ambition is to strengthen sustainability in international supply chains across various commodity sectors and sourcing regions through convening, funding, and learning activities. While working at this organization as a practitioner between 2013 and 2015 I gained experience in a range of different commodity sectors, including fruit and vegetables, soy, spices, and flowers. In 2015 I started my PhD research part-time, continuing my work as a practitioner for a full year before becoming a full-time doctoral researcher. Throughout 2016 I continued to work from the office of my previous employer – now host organization – for one day each week, as part of my data-collection strategy (see Chapter 2 and 5 for details); hence how the connection between academia and practice has manifested in my own career as an engaged scholar thus far.

My experience as a practitioner in the field of sustainable trade strongly motivated me to pursue the research presented in this dissertation, and to study the societally relevant topic of conveners and their role in CSPs. Having worked for an organization that engages in this type of work, I have experienced firsthand how – despite a broad agreement on the relevance of convening in CSPs for sustainable development in supply chains – the concept remains difficult to grasp or explain, even for those professionals who are "doing it," i.e., convening CSPs. This motivated me to submit a research proposal to the Dutch Science Council, who granted me funding for a three-year PhD-research fellowship on conveners and their role in CSPs. An important feature of my research lies in my unique ties to the organization that hosted two of my three case studies, as this allowed me to obtain a deeper understanding of, and immersion in, the practice of convening CSPs for sustainable trade. I consider the combination of both my firsthand experience as a practitioner and my previously established connection to my host organization through prior employment to be strong features of my research for the two reasons I will discuss now.

First, my gradual transition from being a full-time colleague (in 2013-14) to being a part-time colleague and part-time researcher (in 2015) to being a full-time researcher while continuing to work from the office one day a week (in 2016) allowed me to remain closely involved with the organization and its members for a large part of my data-collection period. The benefit here was the possibility of additional data collection in between more "formal" collection moments, such as interviews or (participant) observations during meetings. This proved especially beneficial in the tea case as I collected data over a longer period of time (three years) because it allowed me to maintain close contact with the organizational representatives involved in the CSP – for example, through short chats before or after their (Skype) meetings with program partners. These additional, informal data-collection moments also extended *beyond* the tea and coffee cases I studied. My continued presence at the office led to many informal conversations with (former) colleagues working in various commodity programs. Such conversations often either provided me with novel insights on the topic at hand, or helped confirm or debunk my emerging insights. Furthermore, in the early phases of my

research (when I had not yet selected which cases to study) I was far from limited to the meetings I had scheduled with my colleagues – instead, useful conversations were just as likely to take place over lunch or at the coffee machine as (former) colleagues would ask me about my research plans. In sum, my gradual transition from "insider" (colleague) to "outsider" (external researcher) allowed me to capitalize on my close involvement with the organization during both the case selection and data-collection stages of my research while, in the later stages of data analysis, I was then able to distance myself.

Second, working at the organization for nearly three years allowed me to be both well acquainted with its intricacies and well connected within the organization. As a result, I was able to study the research topic, especially the tea and coffee cases, from an informed position early on. Although I had no prior experience or network in the tea and coffee sectors, my experience working in other, similar sectors had provided me with an understanding and knowledge of not only the common dynamics and challenges encountered within supply chain sustainability, but also of how collaborative efforts work between businesses and non-profits. Moreover, I was familiar with my host organization's internal processes, for example, its monitoring and evaluation framework, its strategic thinking, and its vocabulary of "theories of change," "result areas," and "proof of concepts." This proved very helpful in interviews and conversations with organization representatives, as these interviewees had much less to explain than would have been the case had I been an "outsider." Likewise, because I was interviewing former colleagues who had already known me for several years prior to the start of my research, I had established trust and rapport with my interviewees from the outset.

In sum, my prior experience as a practitioner in the field of sustainable trade, and more specifically my prior employment within the organization that hosted two of the three cases found in this dissertation, allowed me to carry out my research from an informed position. This proved instrumental in my research as it contributed to the depth of the data I was able to collect. Obviously, there were also risks to maintaining such close involvement with my research subjects, e.g., "going native" (Neyland, 2008). Nevertheless, by being constantly aware of my different roles, and by making a point of discussing

them with my research team, I also aimed to maintain enough distance. In Chapter 6 (Discussion), I reflect on some of the dilemmas I faced in both my research and position as an engaged scholar, and on how I mitigated the potential risks of my close involvement with the research subject.

1.3.2 Case selection

This dissertation is grounded in three empirical cases from the coffee, tea, and timber sectors. The case on tea features in two chapters, each of which highlights a different aspect of the case: its strategic orientation in Chapter 2 and its formation process in Chapter 5. In what follows, I explain how I selected my three case studies.

As previously articulated, I was introduced to FSC-Netherlands by someone in my personal network. Accordingly, the selection of my first case was to some extent inspired by the opportunity for research access. My choice to include it as part of this dissertation, however, was more strategically motivated: it provides a counterbalance to the other two cases, which were both hosted by the same organization and allowed me to consider a convening effort that had been undertaken by another organization. Furthermore, the FSC case spoke to my research question in that it allowed me to closely analyze the process of agreement formation vis-à-vis an intention statement between different actors in the timber sector.

The benefit of my relative-insider position within the organization that hosted my other two case studies also manifested in my process of case selection. Being in a position to informally connect with various commodity programs and their program managers informally in the early stages of my research design allowed me to explore the possibilities for convergence in terms of the program's questions and my own research objectives. During this phase I was able to organize a session with one of my doctoral advisors and several interested program managers (from the apparel, coffee, tea, and *landscapes*[6] programs) in order to pitch my research project and refine

6 Initially, the organization had been structured in terms of the commodity sectors (i.e., "programs") in which it was working (e.g., coffee, tea, cocoa). Concurrently with the start of my research, however, a transition took place: in addition to working in commodity sector programs, the organization initiated a new program that focused on sourcing regions, a.k.a. "sustainable landscapes," as well. I will return to this concept in the final chapter of this dissertation.

my research objectives. Eventually, I decided to study the coffee program because of its emphasis on using a CSP approach – referred to as "platforms" by the organization – combined with its vision of the organization in a strong convening role. Moreover, the coffee program also provided me with a clear research question as its management was seeking to collect the key achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from the six national coffee platforms with whom they were already working. The synergy between the program's questions and my own research agenda provided a fertile starting point for my research within the organization.

Finally, I selected the tea case for very different reasons. The CSP I studied as part of the tea program was both in the process of being established at that time and considered particularly innovative, as it more closely connected its sustainability objectives with the core business practices of the participating private-sector partners than any other program the organization had initiated in the past. This made it the perfect example of a transformative CSP in the context of global supply chain sustainability, as it comprised all of the features distinctive of such a CSP as identified in Section 1.2.1. Furthermore, because it was only just being established and was expected to run for quite some time, this case allowed for my continued involvement over time in order to trace the process of convening a CSP's development and implementation in real time. In the end, this case yielded the most extensive dataset, hence its feature in two empirical chapters (2 and 5).

There are several important similarities between the three cases and how I studied them. First, all three cases capture a convening effort in which the convener initiates and implements a CSP strategy in order to further its transformative ambition of sustainable development in a global supply chain. Second, my research in all three cases was hosted by the organization responsible for convening the CSP. As such, and in line with my research question, I departed in each case from the perspective of the convener, who, as a mission-driven organization, both initiated and convened the CSP. Third, in all three cases I made it a priority to collect – in addition to the perspective of the convener – a multitude of other viewpoints, interviewing as many other stakeholders involved in the CSP as possible. In my study of CSPs, I argue that "multiple perspectives" – the collection of which forms one of engaged

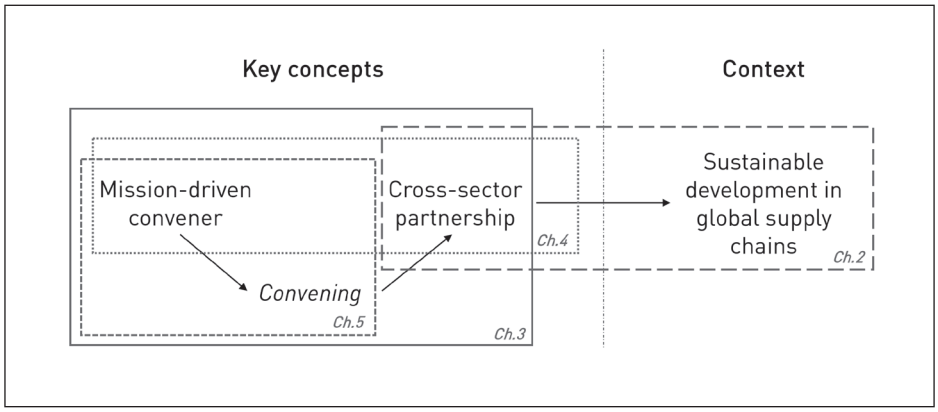
scholarship's core premises (Van de Ven, 2007) – not only refers to the perspectives of academics and practitioners, but also to the perspectives of multiple partners throughout the CSP, i.e.,: businesses (producers, traders, buyers), nonprofit organizations (donors, certification bodies, NGOs) and/or governments, all of whom are likely to experience the CSP and the role of the convener differently.

Despite the similarities between each case, they also differ significantly. For example, the CSPs that formed as a result of the convening efforts differed in regard to: their aims and scope, the number and variety of actors involved, and the different features of their supply chains. Moreover, and in part because of these differences, I used a variety of qualitative methods and tailored my research approach to each case. Throughout this entire process, my choices were also informed by pragmatic considerations; for example, the practical reality of empirical encounters or – in the chapters are composed of or based on published, peer-reviewed journal articles – the suggestions of reviewers and editors in the publication process. For a detailed introduction of each case and its methodology, I refer – as previously stated – to the empirical chapters themselves.

1.4 Chapter overview

Together, the four empirical chapters of this dissertation provide an answer to the research question as they explore and explain how mission-driven conveners initiate and convene cross-sector partnerships. Each chapter contributes a piece of the puzzle and not all key concepts are included in each chapter. Figure 1.2 provides an overview of the foci per chapter. In this section I elaborate further on the contributions of each chapter and on how each study fits in the dissertation as a whole.

Figure 1.2: Overview of the four empirical chapters and the key concepts they address



By starting with the broader picture and gradually zooming in on the phenomenon in question, the order in which I present the four empirical chapters helps reveal the complexities involved in convening CSPs. Chapter 2 contextualizes my research by elaborating in detail on the complexities of sustainable development in supply chains when it comes to CSPs. Chapter 3 introduces the concept of the mission-driven convener, and contextualizes CSPs in light of other sustainability strategies in global supply chains, such as certification. Chapters 4 and 5 zoom in on the concepts of *conveners* and *convening*, and include my reference to paradox theory as a relevant lens to help explain "how conveners convene." While Chapter 4 explores an actor-perspective and elaborates on the position of the convener in the CSP, Chapter 5 examines a process-perspective and focuses on the convening process itself. In the end, zooming in throughout the four empirical chapters allows me to arrive at a thorough understanding of how mission-driven conveners initiate and convene CSPs, and to answer the research question and develop the theoretical contributions found in Chapter 6.

In **Chapter 2 – "Strategizing nature in cross-sector partnerships: Can plantation revitalization enable living wages?" –** I study *how participants in a transformative CSP reveal and reconcile tensions between plants, people, and profits.* Reporting on a transformative CSP in the tea sector, this chapter provides an adequate illustration of the complexity of CSPs in global supply

chains. By examining a CSP's efforts to implement a living wage throughout a sub-Saharan African country's tea industry, with a broader agenda of crop revitalization by 2020, Chapter 2 shows the importance of recognizing the interconnections between the ecological ("plants"), social ("people"), and economic ("profits") components of a CSP in order to realize its transformative potential. Adopting a qualitative, longitudinal case-study methodology, the chapter is based on multiple data sources that pertain to a five-year period of CSP formation and implementation. Data were collected over a period of three years and include interviews, (participant) observations, field visits, and documents. Here, my detailed analysis of the CSP's strategy emphasizes the complexities involved in such CSP efforts, for example: the balancing of different temporalities of plants, people, and profits; the interconnections between these three elements; and the internal-sector dynamics between buyers and producers within one supply chain. Accordingly, the urgency and relevance of CSPs for sustainable development in global supply chains again becomes clear.

Chapter 3 – "Cross-sector partnerships for sustainability: How mission-driven conveners drive change in national coffee platforms" – introduces the concept of the mission-driven convener and asks *how mission-driven conveners strategically organize cross-sector collaboration.* By comparing them to prior, certification-driven strategies of NPOs, I study the CSP strategies of mission-driven conveners whose goal is to strengthen sustainability in supply chains. Furthermore, I argue that my concept of a "mission-driven convener" differs from earlier notions of "conveners," namely because they are both proactive in organizing CSPs and have a normative motivation: they initiate CPSs in order to realize their own sustainability objectives. Whereas prior research often treats conveners as a "resource" to the CSP, which contributes to its effectiveness, I shift the focus toward the convener as a unit of analysis. Using a qualitative case-study methodology, I then analyzed six CSPs (cases) as embedded units within one larger case: the coffee program of the convening organization. To do this, I conducted interviews and collected documents in order to compare the efforts of one NPO across six countries as each national coffee "platform" was established – after which I scrutinized the mission-driven convener's strategy. Taken together, Chapters 2 and 3

include the building blocks of this dissertation as they explore and explain the complexities of CSPs for sustainable development in supply chains, and elaborate on the concept of mission-driven conveners and their use of a "CSP-strategy."

Using a paradox lens to analyze the findings, the subsequent two empirical chapters further zoom in on conveners and convening. **Chapter 4 – "Navigating tensions in a cross-sector partnership: How a convener drives change for sustainability" –** seeks to answer the question: *How does a convener navigate tensions relating to their role and position in their effort to safeguard a transition toward sustainable timber sourcing?* By applying a paradox lens, Chapter 4 offers an alternative perspective on the tensions encountered by CSPs: as opposed to being hurdles or challenges to overcome on the way to success, they are instead phenomena that endure throughout the entire CSP process. This insight also changes the prevailing analysis of the role of the convener, which I explain by identifying two tensions related to the convener's position. These tensions are (1) the convener as a leader who lacks formal authority over CSP partners and (2) the convener as both a stakeholder and, simultaneously, a (neutral) facilitator. By way of a qualitative case study on a CSP convener in the Dutch timber sector, I explain how this convener (FSC-Netherlands) responded to these two tensions over time. Based on documents and interviews collected over an intermitted period of five years, this chapter shows the value of a paradox perspective in helping to better understand the contradictions involved in the convener's role and position within a CSP.

In **Chapter 5 – "Collective convening: Organizational and interorganizational-level tensions in joint cross-sector partnership formation" –** I move from the convener (the actor) to convening (the process) and address the research question: *How does collective convening unfold and how do the interactions between two conveners shape the process?* Empirically, although Chapter 5 is based on the same case featured in Chapter 2 and builds on the same dataset, it emphasizes different elements: while Chapter 2 focuses on the CSP's strategy in formation and implementation, this last empirical chapter zooms in on the convening *process* and focuses on the formation stage only. As such, I use a process research methodology to

analyze my findings in this chapter. In contrast to the other chapters, I focus solely on the convening process, here jointly undertaken by two conveners. Chapter 5 coins the concept of "collective convening," a process in which two (or more) organizations jointly convene the formation of a CSP, reflecting the reality of many complex partnerships. Analyzing how this process of "collective convening" unfolded, I study how both conveners coped with the tensions brought about by the constellation of collective convening. Such tensions manifested at the interorganizational level in the relationship between the two conveners, but were also fed by the dynamics of each convener's own respective organization, which then influenced the collective convening process. To analyze the findings, I again turn to paradox theory to help explain how these tensions shaped the process of collective convening and their implications for our understanding of what convening entails. Table 1.1 presents an overview of the four empirical chapters and their respective methodologies.

Table 1.1: Overview of the empirical chapters and their methodologies

	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Title	Strategizing nature in cross-sector partnerships: Can plantation revitalization enable living wages?	Cross-sector partnerships for sustainability: How mission-driven conveners drive change in national coffee platforms	Navigating tensions in a cross-sector partnership: How a convener drives change for sustainability	Collective convening: Organizational and interorganizational-level tensions in joint cross-sector partnership formation
Research question	How do participants in a transformative CSP reveal and reconcile tensions between plants, people, and profits?	How do mission-driven conveners strategically organize cross-sector collaboration?	How does a convener navigate tensions relating to their role and position in their effort to safeguard a transition toward sustainable timber sourcing?	How does collective convening unfold, and how do the interactions between two conveners shape the process?
Research approach	Longitudinal case study, comprised of retrospective analysis and in-situ participation	Single case study, including six embedded units	Single case study	Longitudinal case study, analyzed using a process research approach
Data sources	In-depth interviews (28), informal conversations, participant observations, field notes, documents	In-depth interviews (22), informal conversations, documents	In-depth interviews (16) and documents	In-depth interviews (28), informal conversations, participant observations, field notes, documents

1.5 Chapter background

The empirical chapters that comprise this dissertation are either composed of or based on a number of international, peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations. Consequently, they have all benefited from peer review in the scientific community. An overview of this output and the background of each chapter can be found below. As both published and presented papers are co-authored, the empirical chapters make use of the we-form. As the first author of each paper, I took the lead in the research design, data collection and analysis, and writing of the (conference) papers. Lastly, while two of my co-authors did presented our paper at certain conferences, as indicated in the overview below, I still took the lead in those instances in developing and submitting the conference paper, and preparing the presentation.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 was, on invitation of a guest editor, submitted for publication in a Special Issue titled "Regenerative organizations: Business and climate action beyond mitigation and adaptation" of *Organization & Environment,* and has been accepted for publication.

Van Hille, I., de Bakker, F.G.A., Groenewegen, P., & Ferguson, J. E. (2019). Strategizing nature in cross-sector partnerships: Can plantation revitalization enable living wages? *Organization & Environment,* DOI: 10.1177/1086026619886848

Paper presented at: 6th biennial International Cross-Sector Social Interactions Symposium: Collaborative Societal Governance: Orchestrating Cross-Sector Social Partnerships for Social Welfare, June 10-12, 2018, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Chapter 3

Van Hille, I., de Bakker, F.G.A., Ferguson, J.E., & Groenewegen, P. (2020) Cross-sector partnerships for sustainability: How mission-driven conveners drive change in national coffee platforms. *Sustainability, 12*(7), 2846.

Paper presented (by 4th author) at: 2019 Academy of Management Meeting: Understanding the Inclusive Organization, August 9-13, 2019, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

Paper presented at: Business & Society Research Seminar 2019: Corporate Social Responsibility, Grand Challenges and Sustainability: The Business of Society?! June 19-21, 2019, VU Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Paper presented (by 2nd author) at: 34th EGOS Colloquium: Surprise in and around Organizations: Journeys to the Unexpected, July 5-7, 2018, Tallinn, Estonia.

Chapter 4

Van Hille, I., de Bakker, F.G.A., Ferguson, J.E., & Groenewegen, P. (2019). Navigating tensions in a cross-sector social partnership: How a convener drives change for sustainability. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 26*(2), 317-329.

Paper presented at: 5th Annual University of Edinburgh Business School Paper Development Workshop: Organizational and Institutional Change, March 5, 2018, Edinburgh, Scotland.

Paper presented at: 30th EGOS Colloquium: Reimagining, Rethinking, Reshaping: Organizational Scholarship in Unsettled Times, July 3-5, 2014, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Paper presented (by 2nd author) at: Research Seminar at Universidad Carlos III, March 10, 2014, Madrid, Spain.

Chapter 5

Van Hille, I., de Bakker, F.G.A., Groenewegen, P., & Ferguson, J.E., (2020). Collective convening: Organizational and interorganizational-level tensions during joint cross-sector partnership formation. To be submitted.[7]

7 Although this chapter has not yet been submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal, it has already benefited from peer review beyond the conference presentations mentioned

Paper presented (by 2nd author) at: 34th EGOS Colloquium: Surprise in and around Organizations: Journeys to the Unexpected, July 5-7, 2018, Tallinn. Estonia.

Paper presented (by 2nd author) at: 28th IABS Conference: From Ambition to Impact, June 29-July 2, 2017, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Paper presented at: 6th European Theory Development Workshop, June 29-30, 2017, Zurich, Switzerland.

Paper presented at: Business & Society Research Seminar 2017: Corporate Social Responsibility in Uncertain Times, June 8-9, 2017, Lille, France.

Paper presented at: 12th Organization Studies Workshop: Food Organizing Matters: Paradoxes, Problems and Potentialities, May 18-20, 2017, Chania, Crete, Greece.

Related output:

In addition to delivering conference presentations and papers to peer-reviewed academic journals, I also engaged in valorization activities throughout my PhD trajectory. The case study presented in Chapter 4 was hosted by FSC-NL, an organization with whom I also shared a practitioner summary of my main findings. The two case studies presented in Chapters 2, 3, and 5 were hosted by a different organization, for whom I wrote two practitioner reports (one for each case). To protect the organization's anonymity, the details of these practitioner reports have not been listed here. Additionally, the host organization used the resulting research papers as evidence to strengthen their coffee and tea programs' "impact research," the results of which were shared with their donors.

here thanks to the feedback of two international experts in the field whom we asked to comment on a draft version of the chapter.